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SARP Training is Life Changing

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SAN DIEGO, Calif. -- Ted Judson (left), assistant department head, Navy Drug and Alcohol Counselor School (NDACS), speaks with Steve Sarian, the NDACS clinical director at the Surface Warfare Medical Institute. NDACS is designed to provide training to military personnel who will eventually provide outreach, screening, assessment, and treatment of alcohol and other drug addictions for fellow Sailors. Photo courtesy of Ted Judson

By Ted Judson, assistant department head, Navy Drug and Alcohol Counselor School (NDACS)

When I entered Navy Medicine's Navy Drug and Alcohol Counselor School (NDACS) in 1987, I had no idea what I was getting into and how my experience there would shape the rest of not only my career, but my life. I found my home at NDACS and nearly 25 years later I'm still in the community. As strange as it may sound, working in this field warms my heart and makes me revel in the blessings of my life every day.

NDACS is a life changing opportunity. The opportunity to really help save the lives of Sailors is both honorable and humbling and almost all students who come through this school acknowledge the personal benefits they have gained.

NDACS is designed to provide training to military personnel who will eventually provide outreach, screening, assessment, and treatment of alcohol and other drug addictions for fellow Sailors. The school is 11 weeks long and located at the Surface Warfare Medical Institute in San Diego, Calif. It offers the potential for both Navy and international civilian certifications.

The school convenes a new class five times a year and is now accepting applications for its session that begins Oct. 4, 2011.

We are looking for individuals who can really relate to other people. Those who have good active listening skills, who can empathize well with others, who can be non-judgmental and show warmth and positive regard for others. We will teach much of this at the school but it helps if they already come with some of these characteristics. It also really helps if they have some measure of insight and self-awareness.

Sailors can be from any rating, but must meet certain criteria, including having no record of non-judicial punishment for at least two years and must have stability in their personal

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affairs.

Students participate in a variety of classroom activities including didactic lectures and experiential activities. They go through a three-week practicum experience where they actually go into the field and work with drug and alcohol abusers in a treatment setting, before wrapping up their final week with information and readiness surrounding their internship.

Practice counseling sessions are recorded so that students can actually see themselves and evolve as counselors.

Once someone graduates NDACS, they enter a minimum one year internship as a Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation Program (SARP) counselor. After the first year they are eligible to take a certification exam. If they pass they are certified as a Navy Alcohol and Drug Counselor (ADC I, a Navy specific certification). After working in the profession for three years they can apply and take an international certification exam that has reciprocity with the 40 states, 14 countries and a dozen or so federal level certification boards who are members of the International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC) http://internationalcredentialing.org/

Navy trained counselors certified at the reciprocal level (ADC II) are highly sought after in the civilian treatment community. We have a long history of people employed at Betty Ford, Hazelden, and many other nationally and regionally recognized treatment centers.

As drug and alcohol counselors we help people walk through some of the most shameful and painful experiences in their lives and watch them come out the other side being better than they were when they came in. An old mentor of mine used to say that whatever the person was before they came into treatment (or NDACS for that matter) they will be better when they come out–better Sailors, better Marines, better spouses, better partners, better communicators. At a recent treatment director's conference, someone made the point that as drug and alcohol counselors we do far more than just treat substance use disorders. The impact of what we do ripples out and affects work centers, squads, commands, as well as families and loved ones. We actually do far more *Sailorization* than many people think.

If you would like to make a difference in your life and the lives of others, apply to become a Navy Drug and Alcohol Counselor. There is no other Navy school like this, no other experience like this. If you want a challenge to reach out beyond what you are doing now, then try this on.

For more information on the application process for NDACS see your special program detailer or contact the schools administration office directly at 619-553-8499.

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